

Discussing How To Restore The Early Church

Returning Intimacy and Power to the Father's Children

*"I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for,
it will be done for you by My Father in heaven.
For where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them."
(Matthew 18:19,20)*



SECTION 2 - LESSON 14

**The Loss of Our Hebraic Roots:
The Hebraic-Christians/Judaism Divide
The Church Encounters A Curse
The Plight of the Jews**

Israel: What Is God Doing? What Should It Mean To Me?



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Section 2 Lesson 14

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INTRODUCTION TO SECTION 2

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

What a magnificent beginning for the newly-birthed Church, firmly established on its Hebraic foundations! Having witnessed the ascension of the Lord into the heavens, the apostles and a hundred-plus others anxiously and eagerly awaited the promised Holy Spirit to clothe them with spiritual power.

That anointing couldn't be stifled! Emerging from behind the closed doors of the upper room, Peter boldly preached his first sermon. Who were his amazed and responsive listeners? The God-fearing Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost to celebrate the giving of God's law to Moses over 1200 years earlier.

These devout men had come from all over the known world, zealous to come before God at the Temple and bring their sin- and peace-offerings for reconciliation. How ready their hearts were to be reconciled to Him through the blood of the Perfect Sacrifice, Jesus, Who was God made man!

Yet even these men who were faithful to the commands of God were pierced

by Peter's stirring command: ***“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord”*** (Acts 3:19). Citing fulfilled prophecies from both Joel and David, Peter was used by the Spirit to bring conviction of heart — and three thousand were added to the number of Jesus's followers that day.

But growth in number wasn't all that God intended for the new called-out ones. Every day they gathered corporately in the temple courts where they could rejoice together as newfound brothers in Christ and discuss with the Apostles how to walk in Jesus's steps (see Acts 5:12).

The more intimate gatherings as extended spiritual family took place in one another's homes, where they broke the bread of communion, ate together, praised God and prayed together (see Acts 2:42,46,47).

The Good News could not be contained. As the earliest followers of Jesus shared their excitement, the message of repentance and grace through the Risen Lord spread. Again, their numbers multiplied. But their freedom to openly share in Jerusalem didn't last. The leaders of the religious system were inflamed with jealousy and anger. But their arrest of Peter and John only served to provide the apostles with a platform to testify to the Lordship of Jesus as Messiah!

God, however, didn't intend for the

followers of Jesus to remain encapsulated in the Holy City. Favor among the populace turned against His flock just as it had against Himself. Directly after the stoning of the Spirit-filled deacon, Stephen, persecution erupted. Jesus's command that His followers would be His witnesses throughout Judea, Samaria and beyond suddenly became reality!

The Gentile nations of whom it was foretold long ago by the prophets would respond to God's invitation were becoming harvested fruit (see Isaiah 56:7,8). Those "*not of Jesus's flock*" (see John 10:16) were determinedly thronging through His gate!

The beginnings were truly remarkable. The called-out ones who were the Body of Messiah were spiritually powerful brothers and sisters, Gentiles and Jews who shook their world. So what happened to fractionalize unity and produce ineffective, Sunday morning spectators?

The tragic answer forms the basis for **Section 2, *The Loss Of Our Hebraic Roots***. The foundational thought and practice on which Jesus based His teaching and which undergirded the Gospels and Epistles alike emanated from the Hebrew Scripture, the Older Testament. The teachings of Jesus were a *deepening of Torah* to reaffirm His Father's intent for a relationship with Himself based on heart obedience and trust. THIS was the spiritual food that nurtured the fledgling Church.

The Jewish believers of the first century were well-grounded in Hebrew Scripture, the only Bible they had! But the Gentile followers of Jesus who flooded in had little grasp of a way of life with God that was a love relationship of obedient trust.

Even though Moses had been preached in every city from the earliest times (Acts 15:21), few Gentiles took God's law seriously. Fewer still could imagine a God Who wanted a loving relationship with them! After all, they were at the mercy of a pantheon of self-serving, lascivious, unpredictable deities who demanded appeasement.

Those among the Gentiles who considered themselves "more enlightened" worshiped at the altar of philosophical argument. The Apostle Paul's adept mind could easily counter their arguments. Yet trust in the Lordship of Jesus required them to set aside the self-sufficiency of their mental acumen in order to "*become as a child*" in relationship with Him.

The influx of Gentiles who were steeped in Hellenistic (or Greek) philosophical thought married the pure truth of God's Word with heathen practices. This amalgamation of truth with ungodliness is called ***syncretism***. Syncretism allows you to keep your old religious beliefs and practices under a veneer of Christianity, regardless of whether your former ways violate God's Word. As a result of this merger, as the Gospel went forth into an unbelieving world, the Church adopted pagan practices and rituals so the converts could feel "at home".

Most of the rituals and practices so common in Christendom today are pagan in origin, thanks to Hellenist and Roman influence. For example, syncretism is at the very core of the "health and wealth gospel", the "church growth movement", and other programs that are designed to attract numbers of people through worldly methods yet have no regard for the holy standards of God's Word.

Syncretism within church circles today blare forth this motto:

Whatever worldly practices or programs are needed, use them so that people will fill pews, feel good about themselves, and come back! The standards of God? That's "legalism"—outmoded, unpleasant, and unnecessary.

As we'll explore in a later lesson, the corrupting effect of Greek syncretism lured followers of Jesus away from the pattern of extended spiritual family who met in homes. By the fourth century, Rome, the most powerful regime known at that time, would ultimately become the *standard of ecclesiastical organization* for the centuries to follow.

Syncretistic leaders within Christianity were prepared to absorb the system of organization that had worked so well for the Roman conquerors. Government power blended with religious dominion. The role of Pontifex Maximus—the chief priest of the cults of the Roman Empire—became the Roman Pontiff of Christendom.

As syncretism flourished, the Hebraic living organism of neighborhoods of believers who ministered to those around them faded. The impersonal system of management by the powerful few took over. Relational responsibility as extended spiritual family dwindled and disappeared as pagan-based clergy rule expanded. The “participatory organism” of the earliest Church became organized with a professional hierarchy, confining the followers of Jesus to spectator status.

As you read about the loss of the Hebraic foundations and the incursion of Hellenism and Romanism, keep this question in the back of your mind:

“Does our Lord *accept* the pagan organization, practices and rituals that fill the Christian religious scene today?”

Once you recognize the extent to which Greek practice and thought as well as Roman hierarchy and organization have infiltrated the Church to this present day, your exploration of the Hebraic foundations of relational responsibility and life application will take on new meaning.

If you're convinced that our Father is restoring the Hebraic foundations of relational responsibility and obedient trust to His children; if you're grieved that Greece and Rome have entrenched their pagan beliefs into the practices and perspective of much of Christendom; then you're ready to prepare your heart to return to that which the first believers held so strongly:

- An ***intimate and obedient relational walk*** with their Lord.
- Strong, steadfast marriages ***with families trained in their homes*** to treasure their God and His ways.
- Righteous, load-bearing ***home fellowships of extended spiritual family*** walking out their faith in ministry to one another and to a needy world.
- Spirit-empowered, church-planting ***evangelists linked devotedly*** to both their senders and their disciples.
- Newly established pockets of followers of Jesus becoming equipped to ***reproduce themselves through the indwelling Spirit's power.***

The Loss of Our Hebraic Roots *The Hebraic-Christian/Judaism Divide*

“When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city” (Luke 21:20,21).

The Book of Acts makes clear that the earliest Hebraic followers of Jesus attempted to stay within the framework of Judaism, the faith of their fathers. In fact, those who followed Jesus as their Risen Messiah were regarded as another sect within Judaism called “**The Way**” (see Acts 24:14). But our Lord had broader, more global plans for His young Church...

You may remember that *fear and intimidation* characterized the means by which the Romans who occupied Israel ruled their subjects. The penalty for rebellion was death, often by horrendously painful crucifixion—a public punishment that was specifically designed to deter potential malcontents.

The *Sanhedrin*, or Jewish ruling party in Jerusalem, feared that Jesus would “rock the boat” of their orderly little world that was bent on placating Rome. Their fear was indeed justified. Far better, as Caiaphas had said, that one man die for the people than the whole nation perish (see John 11:45-53)—a distinct possibility given the contempt with which the Romans held Judea in general.

The Romans would not hesitate to wipe out the entire Jewish population of Jerusalem if they caused trouble. If the Jewish “Messiah” led enough followers into believing that they would be freed from Roman oppression by His Kingship, then *all* Jews would suffer the consequences.

This was a serious matter, both for those who entrusted their lives to Jesus as well as those who refused to follow Him. Not only were there three million Jews living inside Palestine at that time, there were also four million others scattered around the Roman-dominated world. *All* were vulnerable to retribution by their military oppressors.

The non-Messianic Jews, those who did not proclaim Jesus as the Anointed One of God, were divided into two camps: the spiritual Jews, who believed that if they prayed, fasted and performed good works, God would intervene on their behalf; and the Zealots (called *Sicarii*, or “daggermen”), who relied on insurrection against the Roman occupation to bring about freedom.

Within four decades after the ascension of Jesus, Rome’s contempt for the Jews turned to violence. The Jews of Jerusalem displayed open hostility against Florus, the Roman procurator who had stolen large sums of silver from the Temple.

The Jews responded with bold anger. Eleazar the priest put an end to the daily sacrifice for the emperor’s health, an act that revealed that they despised Roman authority. The Zealots overran the Roman garrison in Jerusalem, driving out the soldiers. This First Jewish Revolt, which had begun with such determined hope, ended in failure. *No one* could hold out against the military power of Rome.

With the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, the Temple—the heart of Judaism for worship of God and atonement by animal sacrifice—was destroyed. Jesus’s words were fulfilled: “*I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down*” (Matthew 24:2). An estimated 100,000 Jews had died by sword or famine, or were enslaved.

The brewing unrest of the Zealots prior to the insurrection had not gone unnoticed by the Hebraic followers of Jesus. Perhaps remembering Jesus's words recorded for us in Matthew 24:16, "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains," His followers headed for safety in Pella in the Perea region, about 60 miles northeast of Jerusalem.

The Zealots and other Jews who had opted to stay and fight the Romans in Jerusalem perceived as traitorous those who had fled. This flight marked a turning point in the relationship between the Judaism and the Hebraic Christians.

No longer would the Hebraic Christians be regarded as a sect within Judaism. Following the period of the First Jewish Revolt, the Christianity gradually become recognized as an entity that was separate from the Jewish religion.

The destruction of their Temple placed the non-messianic Jews in a quandary. With no means to atone for their sins by animal sacrifice, there was no longer a purpose for the priesthood of Sadducees who had offered those sacrifices.

Relocating west of Jerusalem to the city of Jamnia, the Pharisees clung to their rule-keeping interpretation of Torah obedience in order to try to unify the various factions of Judaism. They standardized a liturgy for synagogue gatherings. Later rabbinic teachings were elevated almost to Scriptural level, and *good works* replaced the forbidden animal sacrifice for forgiveness of sin.

Since the Hebraic Christians weren't dependent on sacrificed animals for their atonement, the loss of the Temple, while grievous to their hearts, didn't alter their ability to approach God. Their forbears in exile centuries earlier had

experienced the *home* as the small sanctuary spoken of in Ezekiel 11:16:

Therefore say, 'Thus saith the Lord God: Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they have come' (KJV).

In the privacy of homes Hebraic believers could continue to pray, study, and fellowship as their forefathers had done.

"They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled"
(Luke 21:24).

The advent of a "second messiah", Simon Bar Kochba, in AD 132 further alienated the Hebraic believers in the eyes of the non-messianic Jews. He believed that he had been raised up to crush the Roman armies. He was backed by the formidable Rabbi Akiva, who had traveled all over Palestine reawakening a love for Judaism. Through Akiva's renown and the sword of Bar Kochba, thousands of Jews were caught up in the revolution that they hoped would establish God's kingdom on earth.¹

This Second Revolt, however, ended in disaster for the Jewish people. A half million were slaughtered by the Roman military machine; the Holy City was leveled. Jews were no longer permitted into what was left of Jerusalem. And the "second messiah", the one in whom the Jews had put their hope, died a failure.

The Hebraic believers who had returned from Pella or who had remained behind during the First Revolt

again refused to fight. They had but one Messiah, Jesus. Allegiance to another so-called messiah would mean renunciation of the One they worshiped. And, Jesus had warned them, *“At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it”* (Matthew 24:23).

In their choice of Bar Kochba over Jesus, the non-messianic Jews had openly declared their rejection of the Messiah from Nazareth. The split between the Hebraic Christians and the non-believing Jews was just about complete.

Tremendous stress was placed upon non-messianic Jews and Hebraic Christians alike in the aftermath of the Bar Kochba revolt. Roman edicts were enacted forbidding observance of Jewish laws or teaching. Rather than testifying that they'd been grafted into Israel, even Gentile believers had to be circumspect about their Hebraic roots if they wished to survive.

“So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

The influx of Gentiles played a decisive role in the de-Judaizing of the Church. Following the death of the apostles, a mostly Gentile leadership arose, particularly in the influential cities of Antioch, Alexandria and Rome. Since much of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) had been available since the third century BC, Greek-speaking Gentile believers abounded, far outnumbering the Hebrew-speaking Jews by the mid-second century.

As we mentioned earlier, for a period following the resurrection of Jesus, His disciples continued to meet daily in the temple courts (see Acts 2:46). Since they

conformed to the law of Moses and continued to circumcise their sons, followers of Jesus were accepted as *another sect of Judaism*.

That isn't as odd as it might seem today. The teachings of Jesus interpreted and deepened the Law of Moses, they didn't refute it. Our Lord's frame of reference for the Torah pointed to God's relationship with man and His provision of commands that were for *mankind's good*. God's Law was meant to be lived out as an expression of obedient trust in Him Who created and loved His people.

The Law, while impossible to keep by man's own strength, framed the way of life that was pleasing to God. Obedience to the Law brought well-being: *“So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good”* (Romans 7:12). Implicitly understood was that the Law in and of itself could never justify anyone before God.

As Christianity expanded further into the Gentile world, pagan practices were incorporated. Paul was clearly troubled by the powerful influence of Hellenism. So concerned was he for the vulnerable believers in Colosse that he warned, *“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the **basic principles of this world** rather than on Christ”* (Colossians 2:8).

A key issue had been settled by the council meeting in Jerusalem (Acts 15): Yes, Gentiles could be welcomed among the called-out ones without having to convert to Judaism. Tragically, their baggage would include pagan beliefs and practices, many of which exist today throughout Christendom!

The Loss of Our Hebraic Roots The Church Encounters A Curse

“...whoever curses you I will curse...”
(Genesis 12:3).

As Gentile influence and leadership expanded in the Church, less than thirty years after the Second Revolt further division emerged in the form of what we today call “replacement theology”. In essence, God was through with the Jews. They were replaced in God’s favor by the Church.

The Gentile-dominated Church:

- took upon itself the *blessings* that God had promised in the Older Testament to His people Israel.
- relegated to the Jewish people the *curses* of disobedience outlined in those same Hebrew Scriptures.

This development was not entirely unexpected. As we’ll see in a later lesson, Hellenism often used the literary device of *allegory* to attach a spiritual meaning to a material reality. To the Hellenist sensibilities, a *literal* interpretation of the Bible as it was written was vulgar and earthy, too coarse for their “spiritualized” approach to religion. Therefore, the search for “hidden, deeper meanings” could harmonize Scripture with Greek philosophy and conveniently exclude any covenant promises made to the Jewish people by God.

Beginning in the second century a number of Greek philosophers converted to Christianity. But as we shall see, it was a revised “Christianity” of their own philosophical construction. Many of these men, such as Origen, Justin Martyr and John Chrysostom, for example, were

later called “Church Fathers”. What they “fathered”, however, was a Hellenized replacement of the Hebraic foundations.

Among the Church Fathers cited, a common thread was woven: propagation of doctrines against the Jews. Could you picture anyone who was supposedly serving the Jewish Messiah spewing out this diatribe from fourth century bishop **John Chrysostom**? “The synagogue is worse than a brothel... it is the den of scoundrels and the repair of wild beasts... [It is] a place of meeting for the assassins of Christ... a den of thieves... a house of ill fame; a dwelling of iniquity, the refuge of devils, a gulf and abyss of perdition.”²

The violent hatred against the Jewish people that was so flagrantly expressed in the Crusades, the Inquisition, and even in the Nazi Holocaust did not emerge from a vacuum. The roots of anti-Semitism sprang from a *deep-seated repudiation* of the Hebraic origins of Christianity by these “Church Fathers”.

Further severing reliance on the Hebrew Bible was the writing of Church Father **Justin Martyr**. As an eager student of philosophy, he pursued the teachings of Plato, Aristotle, and the Greek Stoics. Justin’s “mentors” had been key figures in developing the *dualism* that fragmented life into the “unsullied spiritual” and “filthy physical” divisions so opposite the Hebraic view of physical and spiritual interconnectedness.

Around AD 160 Justin produced ***Dialogue With Trypho, A Jew***, focused on refuting Jews who objected to the Sonship of Christ. This piece fanned the flames of anti-Semitism that were already smoldering among Gentiles.

The destruction that had been heaped on the Jews, noted Justin, was

deserved, for “*Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him*” (Acts 7:52).

Justin’s condemning treatise confirmed in Gentile hearts that God was through with the Jew, and that His promises to Israel were, in fact, intended for *Christians*. How easy was the next step: the complete dismissal of the Hebraic foundations from the Church. The Hebraic believers who had clung tenaciously to the faith of their fathers found themselves the objects of discrimination, rejection, and ultimately, violence.

In the third century, Church Father Origen wrote, “And these calamities the Jews have suffered, because they were a most wicked nation, which, although guilty of many other sins, yet has been punished so severely for none, as for those that were committed against our Jesus.”³

The perceived *collective guilt* of the Jews thereby justified the caustic censure poured upon them by fourth century church leadership. Not only were the Jews of Jesus’s time held responsible for His sufferings, but all *subsequent generations* of Jews would be considered criminal. [The Roman Catholic Church later branded the Jewish people as “Christ-killers”. Up until as recently as the early 1960’s a prayer that *cursed* the Jews was read aloud by priests annually on Good Friday.]

By the fourth century the Hebraic foundations upon which the earliest Church was founded had been totally forgotten. As a result of this loss, the holy fear of God’s promise to Abraham—to curse those who curse him and his descendants—vanished. As succeeding lessons will demonstrate:

God cursed anti-Semitic Christendom with centuries of domination by the demonic principalities of Hellenist syncretism and Roman organization.

The Loss of Our Hebraic Roots *The Plight of the Jews*

“I ask then: Did God reject His people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin” (Romans 11:1)

The remainder of this lesson follows the church’s treatment of the Jews over the centuries. Most Christians today are ignorant of this dark part of church history. But God remembers those He calls “*the apple of His eye*” (Zechariah 2:12), and His promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3).

History demonstrates that our promise-keeping God has acted against both nations and sectors of Christendom in which anti-Semitism has flourished. Why? Because He is keeping His vow to Abraham—the biological father of the Jew and the spiritual father of those who follow Jesus.

For example: During the past century, Great Britain, upon whose empire “the sun never set”, actively purposed to oppose God’s plan to return the Jews to the Land of Israel. Within a decade British dominion had almost disappeared. In the 1980’s, the USSR vehemently persecuted its Jewish people and prevented most from emigrating to Israel. By 1990, the USSR didn’t exist.

Determine for yourself if Christians over the centuries have violated God’s Word through anti-Semitic words and deeds. If you agree that this has been done, does any guilt fall upon *you*?

Let's discuss a few specific points of history in which shovelful of anti-Semitism covered over the Hebraic foundations of Christianity. For Christians the edict of Roman Emperor Constantine in AD 313 brought welcome relief. The leader's proclamation announced toleration of both paganism as well as Christianity, freedom of worship, and even a return of property that had been confiscated from followers of Jesus. This was excellent news for believers who had held to their faith during earlier times of intense persecution.

Sadly, this edict was no godsend for the Jews. Their "freedoms" were limited to two choices: accept baptism into Christianity or be forced out of their homes. Jerusalem, the Holy City, was once more forbidden to them. Their homeland of Palestine had become "Christian"; they had become aliens in the land promised by God to their father Abraham.

Succeeding centuries found no improvement in Jewish life, particularly in Europe. There the policy remained: Convert and be baptized. Or, resist and be expelled or killed. Needless to say, numbers converted, although some "relapsed" when pressure was off. However, of the three million Jews who had occupied the European arena in AD 70, only a half million remained by the dawn of the seventh century.

By the end of the twelfth century, numerous heresies had entered the church. Convening the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, Pope Innocent III reinstated all the dreaded anti-Semitic laws that the Christianized Roman Empire had formulated almost a millennium earlier. For example,

- Jews were ordered to separate from Christians; they could no longer even live near one another.
- Jewish holy books were torched. Rabbinical schools were closed, again reinforcing the Jewish home as the center for learning and religious instruction.
- All Jews were required to wear a badge of distinction, a yellow circle. (This would be the precursor of the yellow Star of David to be worn by all Jews under Nazi tyranny.)

The Council intended that this repression of the Jews would serve as a warning to errant Christians who were straying from the Roman Catholic fold. It would also be seen retroactively by the Jews as a foreshadow of ghetto segregation to come.

Expulsion of the Jews in Europe: *The Hidden Tragedy*

For generations Jews had populated the worlds of finance and trade. The Western church, bowing to Hellenistic dualism, had long considered with disdain anything to do with money. Many Jews who had been forced from agricultural enterprises due to confiscation of their lands became adept financiers.

As moneylenders and trade intermediaries between Moslems and Christians, many Jews grew exceedingly prosperous. With so much untapped treasure for their coffers, Gentile noblemen and civil authorities all over Europe came up with the same idea: Expel the Jews and take their wealth. The noblemen could confiscate the Jewish land and at the same time cancel out their debts to the evicted moneylenders.

These expulsions did not occur simultaneously; a sampling of dates and their locations will give you an idea of how universal the situation was. To the Jew it became increasingly a matter of, “Where can I go?”

Official government policy:

- twice expelled the Jews from France, in 1306 and 1394;
- from Hungary between 1349 and 1360;
- from Austria, Lithuania, Spain and Portugal in the fifteenth century;
- from numerous localities in Germany between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.
- Jews were also forced to leave Russia during the three hundred years between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, where could the Jew safely rest his head?

To understand why “Christian” people would not only tolerate these expulsions but even encourage them, you must understand an unfortunate aftermath of the Fourth Lateran Council mentioned earlier. It was at this thirteenth century gathering that the doctrine of *transubstantiation* became church dogma. This doctrine affirmed that the elements of communion were miraculously transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ by the priest at the Catholic *Sacrifice* of the Mass—the Levitical sacrificial system all over again!

[Our Hebraic ancestors in the faith believed the bread and wine were the body and blood of Jesus Christ because *He said so*. Obviously, as Jews, they would never partake of actual flesh and blood—an act that would directly violate *Torah*. See Jesus’s discussion of this matter in John 6:29-63. We’ll come back to this in a later lesson.]

The superstitious and fearful populace was already suspicious of the *perceived* focus of Jews on blood sacrifices because of Older Testament history. It took no stretch of imagination to therefore accuse Jews of kidnapping and torturing sacramental wafers to blaspheme Christ.

This account may seem incredible today, but anti-Semitism can blind even the most educated. The year 1298 found 100,000 Austrian and German Jews obliterated. The cause? A Communion wafer that had turned red was discovered. The Jews were accused of pounding the “body of Christ” until it bled. (Centuries later, it would be discovered that a certain bacterial growth caused the whitish wafers to turn red when exposed to damp cellar conditions.)

Another incident that seemed an isolated occurrence but quickly exploded into irrational persecution: In thirteenth century rural England, a young boy was discovered missing. Three weeks later his body was found in a cesspool into which he had apparently tripped and drowned. Local peasants, however, were convinced that the Jews had crucified him, and even had the “confession” of a tortured Jew to prove it.

Nineteen Jews were hanged without a trial. Ritual murder accusations became recurrent, not only in England but *throughout Europe*. Ultimately, Jews would become scapegoats not only for ritual murders, but also for well poisoning and the catastrophic bubonic plague that would wipe out a third of Europe’s population. Could the plague have been God’s curse as He upheld His promise to Abraham?

By the fourteenth century, superstition mixed with fear resulting in the accusation of “blood libel” against the

Jews. As mentioned earlier, the Jews were forbidden by *Torah* to consume blood of any kind: ***“This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live: ‘You must not eat any fat or any blood’”*** (Leviticus 3:17). In spite of this injunction, Jews were accused of blaspheming Christ by mixing Christian blood into their Passover celebration elements. Many were sentenced to death without any proof beyond mere accusation.

Playing on this underlying fear, in the 1930’s the Nazi newspaper *“Der Stuermer”* vividly portrayed rabbis as villainous bloodsuckers preying on hapless German children. Saudi Arabian newspapers carried repeated charges that Jews celebrating Passover consume Gentile blood⁴, words sure to inflame volatile Arab hatred for their Jewish neighbors.

By the end of the fifteenth century, Jews had been expelled from much of western Europe. Despite their exile, Jews continued to be vilified in literature. Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* both portrayed Jews as bloodthirsty villains. Jewish blood, however, was about to be spilled in ways unimaginable in their brutality.

Spanish Inquisition (1481-1808)

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:1,2).

Contrary to common misconception, the Inquisition was not focused solely on the Jewish people. Protestants were

persecuted for refusing to adhere to Roman Catholic doctrine. Jews were apprehended for worshiping a foreign god. Even some Catholics were arrested and stripped of their land and possessions if they failed to satisfy the all-powerful Inquisitors.

Anyone who failed to confess Christ as He was presented by the Roman Catholic church was branded a heretic and was scrutinized and interrogated. How could the church fall into such evil misrepresentation of the doctrines of Christ?

The hierarchical church councils reasoned that only true “Christian” believers (i.e., those considered faithful to Roman Catholic doctrine and practice) could be accepted into Christ’s eternal presence. Far better that apostates suffer for a little while here on earth in the hope of causing them to see the Truth than lose their souls for eternity.

Recognizing that confessions gained under duress might be suspect, the Inquisition priests developed *categories of punishment* for those who might not be utterly sincere. Individuals who confessed to being “secret Jews” were allowed the privilege of strangulation prior to burning at the stake.

Those who refused to accede to the accusations, or who even boldly held fast to their Jewish identity, were repeatedly tortured in order that they might be “convinced” of the truth of Christianity. If, after all that, they still refused to convert, the “heretics” were publicly burned in a ceremony well-attended by the “faithful.”

Attacking dead heretics with equal zeal, the Inquisitors exhumed the bones of suspected “secret Jews” and burned them as well. It is little wonder that few Jews “went public” with their faith.

In Spain, however, there were enough who practiced Judaism in secret that a term was coined for them: *Marranos*, meaning “swine.” They kept their identities well-hidden from all but the most trusted of family and associates.

Many *Marranos*, in fact, were able as “outward” Christians to rise to power in public office and even marry into aristocracy. Ultimately, they, too, came under the wrath of the Inquisition. The danger and the pressure to convert became overwhelming. An estimated 30,000 *Marranos* were burned at the stake.

Most of the surviving Jews and followers of Jesus escaped Spain for the borders of more tolerant nations such as the Netherlands, North Africa and England. The toll on the Jewish and the Christian communities during the three and a half centuries of the Inquisition was great: 400,000 faced trial. Not until 1834 would the Inquisition finally be abolished throughout Europe.

One point pertaining to Martin Luther (1483-1546) must be mentioned. The great reformer represents an extreme example of one who, having once loved Jews, turned into a Jew-hater. During the early years following his break with the Roman papacy, Luther determined to accomplish that which the Catholic church had failed to do: draw large numbers of Jews to the faith.

Relying on the impact of the printed word, in 1523 he penned a pamphlet, “*That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*”. Faulting the church and the shameless lives of its leadership for alienating the Jewish people, Luther argued passionately for the right of Jews to compete in the marketplace. (Up until this time, they had been relegated to the position of moneylenders.)

After years of growing frustration and anger at his failure to convert the Jews, Luther’s response was not unlike the attitude of the third and fourth century Church Fathers in their Jew exhortation.

Alerting Christians to be on their guard, Luther warned, “Verily a hopeless, wicked, venomous and devilish thing is the existence of these Jews, who for fourteen hundred years have been, and still are, our pest, torment, and misfortune. They are just devils, and nothing more.”⁵

Luther’s fury against the Jewish people found expression in a tract entitled “*Concerning Jews and Their Lies*” (1543). Labeling the Jews as “venomous” and “disgusting vermin,” he recommended that the following steps be taken against them:

- Their synagogues should be set on fire;
- their homes should be destroyed;
- all Jewish holy books should be confiscated;
- rabbis must not teach, under threat of death;
- passport and travel privileges should be revoked;
- Jews should be forbidden to charge interest on loans;
- young Jewish men and women should be forced into hard manual labor.⁶

Unfortunately for the Jews, these anti-Semitic writings became well known not only throughout Germany but wherever Luther was revered. Four hundred years later, the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 9-10, 1938 that resulted in the death and destruction of hundreds of Jews and their property was deemed a fitting birthday remembrance for Martin Luther.

Is it any wonder that at the 1946 Nuremberg Trials, virulently anti-Semitic

news publisher Julius Streicher used the following defense: “He had said nothing worse against the Jews than had been pronounced some four hundred years earlier by Martin Luther.”⁷

Ghettos and Pogroms

The dank, overcrowded urban spaces referred to as ghettos originated in sixteenth century Italy. The Reformation that had brought freedom of faith to many believers escaping the evil practices of Roman Catholicism witnessed the initiation of yet another reprisal against the Jews.

The Italian Counter-Reformation reinstated the oppressive, anti-Semitic medieval laws. These mandates ushered in an onslaught of persecution and death that would last until the eighteenth century. In Eastern Europe entire Jewish villages were massacred in a single day.

Vehement in his hatred against the Jews, Pope Paul IV instituted legislation that would segregate Jews into arenas under papal control, called ghettos. He reasoned that since God had condemned the Jews for the sin of crucifying Christ, the church must respond in an equally unloving manner. (Never mind the abundant Scripture that proved it was *man's sin* that Jesus willingly died for in fulfillment of prophecy!) The ghetto concept spread quickly throughout Europe, lasting until the late 1800's.

Just as Hitler had gained support for his anti-Semitism through Luther's writings, so would the Nazis find their basis in ghettos for confining the Jews to concentration camps.

Ghetto segregation was carried to extremes in nineteenth century Russia,

where the Jewish people were confined by the “Christian” monarchy to an area of wilderness known as the Jewish Pale. This isolation in itself did not cause the extreme anguish that another imperial edict brought about: Jewish boys between the ages of twelve and eighteen were ordered to serve in the Russian military. And for the Orthodox church, this conscription was the means to root out the faith of Abraham.

The captive audience of children was exposed to ruthless torture to force them to convert to Christianity. To the families back home, there was no suffering more intense than losing their children to the faith of the enemy. [Note: This same tactic of forced assimilation and denial of heritage was employed by Christian missions to the Native Americans on reservations. Native children were kidnapped from their parents and forced into boarding schools so that that their “heathen culture” could be destroyed.]

In order to understand the fear and hatred of Christians against Jews during the nineteenth century, you need to consider the astonishing impact of industrialization and international trade. Jews had been involved in merchandising for generations, and had risen rapidly in the arena of economic opportunity. The old European aristocracy represented an outmoded way of life; their influence was dying. The unemployed poor, replaced by mechanized labor, resented the prosperity of the Jews.

As European stock markets faltered, blame was heaped onto the financiers, the Jews. Anti-Semitic Protestants and Catholics alike agitated public sentiment against them.

Fearing an international conspiracy, Russian forces slew Jews by the thou-

sands. *Pogroms*, violent waves of attacks against the Jews, swept throughout Russia between 1881 and 1920. A forged document, "**Protocols of the Elders of Zion**," supposedly written by a non-existent International Jewish Congress, detailed plans for the destruction of Christian organizations and a Jewish world takeover. (This spurious document has recently resurfaced among Arab nations, perpetrating once again another ploy to justify Jew-killing.)

Published worldwide, this counterfeit document inflamed suspicion and hatred toward the Jewish people. As pogroms, persecutions and famine increased, especially among the Jews of Eastern Europe and Russia, hope of freedom in the "New World" shone as their only chance for life. Waves of Jews poured into the Americas, particularly to the trade center of New York. Two million Russian Jews would find refuge in the United States.

Not only Russian Jews were eager to escape their homelands. In 1884, a Jewish officer in the French army, Alfred Dreyfus, was falsely convicted of treason based on phony evidence. An uprising of the French populace against the Jews ensued. Other European nations became incited by an official Jesuit publication, "**Civilita Cattolica**", which promoted anti-Semitism and encouraged exclusion of Jews from all of Europe. The Vatican concurred with this opinion.

In the US and South America, Catholics condemned both this article and the false imprisonment of Dreyfus. The French president, the military, and the judicial bureaucracies, however, refused to budge. Despite massive evidence of Dreyfus's innocence, they would not reverse their decision. French mobs ransacked Jewish shops. Algerians,

allies of the French, followed suit, joined by Arabs.

Finally, in 1906, with world opinion ringing against them, the French court declared Alfred Dreyfus innocent. But the damage to world Jewry had been done. The stage was set for a new German doctrine: **Aryan racial superiority**.

Following World War I in Europe, Nazism and the ideology of Aryan superiority were beginning to advance. These ideas did not spring suddenly upon an unsuspecting society, however. The populace became *gradually desensitized* to the plight of the Jew in a carefully planned and enacted three-stage thrust.

The first stage found the Jews being mocked as they had been through history: tormented by youths, humiliated by placards, occasionally subjected to violence. Thus habituated to ignoring the Jews as *individual human beings*, the Germans were ripe for the next stage: suppression of *categories* of non-Aryans. Since German reason accepted the deceit of Aryan superiority, the next stage, death and incineration, became a blur of ethical indifference.

And where was the church during this demonic dynasty of destruction? Beyond some vocal protests and quiet humanitarian efforts of individuals, there was... silence. The papacy, careful not to offend German power, refrained from issuing moral responses. The Protestant churches, for the most part, turned their eyes the other way. Six million Jews and several million Gentiles would encounter death in gas chambers, slave labor camps and factories.

From the biblical period to the present day you'd be hard-pressed to find a single century in which the Church has

not in some significant way contributed to the anguish of the Jewish people. Although the term “anti-Semitism” did not come into use until 1879 (it was coined by a German political agitator), it soon became associated with hatred of all things Jewish.

The Jewish community worldwide cannot forget the atrocities perpetrated against them by Christianity. To the disgrace of humanity, expression of hatred against the Jewish people continues to this day, from subtle degrading comments to gross violence—and not only in the volatile Middle East!

As you may recognize, the influence of the Hebraic roots seems to have disappeared early in the history of the Church. Why has no serious attempt been made to reestablish our Hebraic heritage before now? Many factors have affected this. A large and influential segment of the church has clung to a *supersessionist* attitude: the Body of Christ has become the “new Israel,” *superceding and replacing the Jews* as the chosen people of God. This, of course, flies in the face of Scriptural truth: God keeps His promises!

Next, there is potential embarrassment to the church establishment if the vitriolic anti-Semitism of some of the early “Church Fathers” is revealed. These men have been held in such reverence by Christianity that disputing even one point of their teachings could brand you a heretic. Other points of their teachings might then come into question, and few want to confront centuries of impotent, man-centered, counterfeit religious practices.

Since the Hebraic foundations of the Church were lost in the early centuries following Christ’s ascension, many of today’s church practices came about as a

result of the writings of the “Church Fathers”. Remember, many of these men had been influenced by Greek philosophy were syncretistic in their writings; some were also virulently anti-Semitic.

The Loss of Our Hebraic Roots *Israel: What Is God Doing? What Should It Mean To Me?*

***“I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you
I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be
blessed through you”*** (Genesis 12:3).

The roots of Judaism and Christianity go back to our common father, Abraham. Jesus Himself descended from Abraham’s great-grandson, Judah, from the line of Isaac and Jacob. Nineteen hundred years of ecclesiastical prejudice and ignorance concerning the Hebraic roots of Christian faith have resulted in persecution of the Jews. At the same time, the church has lacked the power and vitality of the first century Hebraic Christians as documented so clearly in the Book of Acts.

As a Hebraic understanding of God’s Word is being restored, isn’t our Father calling the Church today to bless the Abraham’s children, especially since it was through them that His Word was written and preserved? Will He not fulfill His promise to bless those who bless the descendants of Abraham, even as He fulfills His prophecy to reveal to them the One they pierced (see Zechariah 12:10)?

Will part of the blessing the Church receives entail a restoration of the early vitality and power that once characterized it?

Please ponder this as you continue on in Section 2, particularly as you realize

how Hellenism and Romanism have so tragically influenced Christianity.

God Is Changing the Hearts of the Gentiles

A heightened interest in fully appreciating God's faithfulness to keep His Word has been spreading among Christian communities. Many followers of Jesus have become more aware of an ever-increasing amount of "divine activity" occurring among the Jewish people and the land of Israel.

With the blinders of anti-Semitism removed, many Christians are realizing that God's promises to the Jew are still in effect. He *hasn't* rejected them. In fact, our promise-keeping Lord is restoring them back to the land of Israel one last time just as He promised through His prophets.

At the same time, a wave of repentance is taking place within various parts of Christendom as people take responsibility for the sins of the past against the Jews. Consider the following news items that highlight repentance among Christian churches, a repentance that acknowledges with shame the participation in the historic persecution of the Jews.

In 1962 Pope John XXIII convened Vatican Council II. At that gathering, the Jews were decreed innocent of the charge of "Christ-killer." (During World War II, Monsignor Angelo Roncalli, who would later become Pope John XXIII, had developed an extraordinary reputation for saving thousands of Jews from Rumania, Hungary and Bulgaria by providing Jews with fake Catholic baptismal certificates.)⁸

The following prayer, composed shortly before that Pontiff's death, admitted the church's sins against the

Jewish people and sought forgiveness from God for injustices committed:

We realize now that many, many centuries of blindness have dimmed our eyes, so that we no longer see the beauty of Thy Chosen People and no longer recognize in their faces the features of our first-born brother. We realize that our brows are branded with the mark of Cain. Centuries long has Abel lain in blood and tears, because we had forgotten Thy love. Forgive us the curse which we unjustly laid on the name of the Jews. Forgive us that, with our curse, we crucified Thee a second time.

The Diocese of Cincinnati concurred: "The Jewish people is not collectively guilty of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, nor of the rejection of Jesus as Messiah. The Jewish people is not damned, nor bereft of its election. Their suffering, dispersion, and persecution are not punishments for the crucifixion or the rejection of Jesus."⁹

Lutherans have recanted of Martin Luther's writings against the Jews. In 1984, celebrating the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth, the World Lutheran Federation issued this statement:

We cannot accept or condone the violent verbal attacks that the Reformer made against the Jews. The sins of Luther's anti-Jewish remarks and the violence of his attacks on the Jews must be acknowledged with deep distress, and all occasion for similar sin in the present or the future must be

removed from our churches... Lutherans of today refuse to be bound by all of Luther's utterances against the Jews.¹⁰

Added to these acknowledgments of sinful atrocity is a document from the United Methodists:

Jews have been victims of systematic oppression and injustice... Christians must also become aware of that history in which they have deeply alienated the Jews...The persecution by Christians of Jews throughout the centuries calls for clear repentance and resolve to repudiate past injustice and to seek its elimination in the present.

Is the information we've shared here new to you? Yes or No? How does it make you feel when you read about the historic persecution by Christians of the Jewish people?

Has your attitude toward the Jewish people changed after reading this lesson? Yes or No? If yes, describe the changes.

Our Hebrew spiritual forefathers, Nehemiah, Jeremiah and Daniel, understood the importance of asking forgiveness for the sins of prior generations, even when they themselves had not participated:

Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you" (Nehemiah 1:6; see also Jeremiah 3:25, Daniel 9:8).

These prophets had not themselves walked in sin, but they bore *spiritual responsibility* anyway for not only their own burden but also that of their ancestors.

You may want to consider that God may be holding *you* responsible for the anti-Semitic actions and attitudes of your Christian ancestors. For whatever reason, our Father may be showing you the light in this lesson so that you can repent on behalf of those who mistreated the Jews. *You* can help end the curse on Christendom that has plagued it for hundreds of years.

[For further reading on God's prophetic fulfillment to the Jewish people today, see our Hebraic Article>Prophetic Insights, [Fulfilling Biblical Prophecy: Israel And The Jewish People Today](#)].

Please consider your own responsibility to God and to the Jewish people and respond accordingly.

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